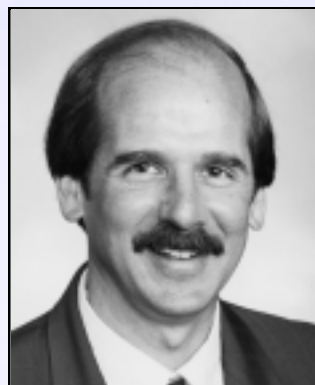

A Report on Lake Tapps



April 1999



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

There's been so much in the news this year about floods and landslides, that scarce attention has been paid to the threat Lakes Tapps area residents are facing. We want you to know that we haven't forgotten you or your problems just because there aren't TV cameras running pictures of your homes on the news.

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide you updated information on this issue, so that you have a better idea of what is happening, might happen, and what you and others can do about it.

Please give us a call if you have questions or need additional information.

A blue ink signature of Rep. Mike Stensen.

Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Rep. Chris Hurst.

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A brief history of Lake Tapps

As you well know from the presence of tree stumps in the lake bed, Lake Tapps is not a natural lake. Nor is it publicly owned. In 1911, the Buckley diversion dam was built on the White River. Canals were dug, a powerhouse built and the Lake Tapps storage reservoir was formed. In 1954, an investment group bought Puget Power's property around the lake and developed it. Pierce County approved plats and home lots were put up for sale at prices ranging from \$1,200 to \$2,400.

In 1966, homeowners asked Puget Power to keep the lake filled between April 1 and October 1. Puget Power said it couldn't because of power generation needs, but an agreement was reached to keep it filled from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

In 1983, Puget Power applied for a federal operating license for the White River power project, and a few years later, reached an agreement with the Muckleshoot Tribe to take less water from the river for power generation to protect salmon habitat.

In late 1997, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission granted Puget Sound Energy (formerly Puget Power) an operating license for the White River project. The project had been operating without a license since 1911. But conditions put on the license further limited water withdrawals from the river to protect fish. PSE's appeal to those additional restrictions remains pending. These are the restrictions we have asked our congressional delegation to address.

In the spring of 1998, PSE met with five homeowners' association representatives to discuss filling the lake earlier in the spring. PSE warned the groups that it might quit the hydro project. Increased restrictions on water use and changes in the energy market might spell big losses for the project.

What's happening now?

Puget Sound Energy, the company that owns Lake Tapps, is talking about abandoning the lake and its \$50 million White River hydroelectric project after 88 years of operation. Currently, the lake is full between the end of May and Labor Day, under a 1966 agreement between PSE and Lake Tapps residents. Water from the lake is used to generate electricity at the White River plant.

The present problem began in 1997, when the Federal Energy Reserve Commission in Washington, D.C., ordered PSE to increase river flow and divert less water into reservoirs. Additional river flow was needed to preserve diminishing salmon runs. PSE appealed the ruling and said that enhancing the river flow while keeping the lake full during the summer would be too costly because of the power generation it would lose.

What are we doing to help you?

We can't tell the federal government what to do, but we have written to our congressional delegation asking them to help ease restrictions and protect area residents. We also are helping to coordinate communication among various groups working on the issue.

What about the salmon listing?

On March 16, the federal government listed the Puget Sound chinook, including White River chinook, and other western Washington salmon, as endangered. While we can't say exactly what this will mean, the consensus is that it will further

increase restrictions on water withdrawal from the river, and decrease the likelihood of the federal waiver we’re seeking. The governor maintains that “extinction is not an option” for Washington salmon.

The new listing will affect the way everyone in Western Washington lives and does business. It is hoped that local decisions will drive recovery efforts, so they are relevant to each area’s needs. But we expect dramatic changes, and not just in where new developments can be built. It is possible that we may be facing the imposition of limits on how much water we use to shower and wash our clothes and cars. It will probably affect when we water our lawns and whether we use fertilizers or pesticides, which find their way into streams.

In 1977, only 50 chinook returned to the White River. In 1996, 300-600 adult White River chinook returned to spawn, the result of a 20-year recovery effort. But the hold was not permanent, and the numbers continue to decrease. The cause in the decrease in numbers is subject to debate, but there is no question chinook in the White River have a long way to recovery. Water, habitat and harvest are key to that recovery.

What would happen if PSE quit the project?

Once the White River turbines stop and water no longer is diverted from the river, the water right disappears. The state of Washington would probably refuse to grant another. It’s unlikely that anyone could require the utility to keep the lake in its present condition.

What should residents be doing?

Lake Tapps area residents should familiarize themselves with major players in the issue. There are groups that have been working on this issue for over a year, and there are new groups that have just formed. Coordination is vital. Become an active member and learn as much as you can about the project, the lake, and what can be done to keep the lake filled.


What are our options?

Lake Tapps residents should be developing a contingency plan to protect their home values. Some options are:

- Form a self-taxing district, if necessary, to buy the project and to help pay to run it and keep the lake full for as many months as possible.
- Work with a public entity, such as Pierce County, Bonney Lake, the Army Corps of Engineers or some other public agency to accept transfer of PSE’s water rights if the utility leaves.
- Find a buyer for the project who will keep it running and maintain the lake.

Who is working on the problem?

West Tapps Maintenance Club	(253)891-2729
Tapps Island Association	(253)862-6616
Snag Island Homeowners Association	(253)862-4242
Driftwood Point Homeowners Assoc	(253)862-6776
Inlet Island Homeowners Assoc	(253)862-7767
Tacoma Point Homeowners Association ..	(253)862-4191
Jan Shabro, Pierce County Council	(253) 798-3635



Photos courtesy of Ralph Mason - Lake Tapps resident

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